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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 006312

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SUBJECT: MEA ON PAKISTAN TALKS: SOME PROGRESS, MANY DOUBTS

REF: NEW DELHI 6249 (NOTAL)

Classified By: POLCOUNS Geoff Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: MEA Pakistan policy manager Dilip Sinha believes India and Pakistan made good but slow progress in their latest round of Composite Dialogue efforts, with a more constructive climate than earlier discussions. They agreed to extend the LOC ceasefire, establish nuclear hotlines, pre-notify missile tests, boost cultural exchanges, start flag-level military meetings on the LOC, and will discuss an MOU on drug trafficking at the August 29 meeting of Home Secretaries. Sinha complained that Pakistan is unwilling to

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move forward in areas of obvious benefit, like sporting and academic ties between militaries. Also, India remains deeply skeptical of Musharraf's recent rhetoric about clamping down on terrorism. PolCouns pushed back on Sinha, saying Musharraf is trying his best and we needed to work together to help him achieve his vision for a moderate Pakistan, since its realization was in our common interest. We need to keep the pressure on both sides as they head into the Musharraf-Sinha meeting at UNGA. We should also work with the Indians to develop a common method for evaluating progress against terrorism from Pakistan so we can remain in step with each other as Musharraf pursues moderation. END SUMMARY.

DECENT BUT SLOW PROGRESS IN THIS ROUND OF TALKS

2. (C) PolCouns and Poloffs met with MEA Joint Secretary (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran) Dilip Sinha August 12 to get the MEA view on recently-concluded Composite Dialogue talks with Pakistan and to push the GOI to take a positive view of Musharraf's efforts within Pakistan. Sinha said atmospherics had been good, with discussions remaining more positive than in the first round of talks, although he also noted some areas where the Pakistani side would not budge. Sinha said the issues discussed in this round (missile test pre-notifications, establishment of a Foreign Secretaries hotline, cultural exchanges) were less controversial and positions were less combative as a result. Sinha explained that the Culture Secretaries had agreed measures for pilgrims and for tourism, as well as an exchange of film festivals, the first of which would be in India due to continued concern in Pakistan about the showing of Indian films. Sinha also observed continued Pakistani resistance to dropping the long-standing ban on Indian films, which costs India greatly due to piracy. The Pakistanis, surprisingly, resolutely refused defense think-tank exchanges or sporting events between armed forces teams, suggesting that the military establishment is wary of informal interaction. We heard separately from a top Indian newspaper editor that not only was his recent request for a visa to visit denied, but a fellow journalist who had a ten-year multiple visa was expelled from Lahore on the flight on which she arrived.

NUCLEAR HOTLINE TO START, LOC CEASEFIRE EXTENDED

3. (C) The two sides also agreed on new hotlines to avoid nuclear tension and miscalculation; on each side one will be in the Foreign Secretary's office while the other will be housed in the Directorate General for Military Operations (DGMO). Both will be dedicated circuits. India had wanted one hotline to be via submarine cable, and the other via satellite, but Pakistani vehemently refused, despite the Indian belief that submarine cables can be prone to outages and that a separate medium would be desirable. In the event, the two dedicated lines will be via submarine cable. PolCouns commented that the need for crisis communications is demonstrated by our own experience in the Cold War, and a recent episode in which an Air Sahara jet en route from Delhi to Srinagar strayed inadvertently into Pakistani airspace to avoid a storm, reportedly leading to the scrambling of Pakistani interceptors. Sinha noted that the two sides extended the cease-fire on the LOC, and agreed to refrain from building new militarily-significant defensive structures (ie, not the fence, but bunkers for troops and tank traps, etc). They will also begin a series of flag-rank meetings along the LOC (using loud-hailers for now, and possibly moving up to field radios in the future).

HOME MINISTERS: DRUGS, COUNTER-TERRORISM, AND DEEP DOUBTS

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14. (C) The Indian side presented the Pakistanis a draft MOU on drug trafficking, but Sinha doubted it would be finalized before the Home Secretaries meet in September. It would also be important, opined Sinha, to see how the Pakistanis responded in countering terror. Sinha insisted that the test of Musharraf's sincerity will be Pakistani action against entities such as the Jihad Council that continue to issue threats against India. Pakistan-based enemies of India such as Hafiz Mohamed Saeed of Lashkar-e-Toiba must be muted for India to have trust in Pakistani rhetoric. India was also hearing reports that leaders of banned groups arrested since Musharraf's July 29 speech have since quietly been released. Sinha was quite critical, saying Musharraf is all about stunts, but very little action. The expulsions of foreign students from Madrasas did nothing to curb terror, Sinha lamented, but they had certainly made many in Pakistan angry; Sinha wondered why Musharraf did not use scalpel-like precision to target the true India-haters, instead of pushing broad initiatives that sound nice but achieve little in practical terms. Continuing, Sinha said the "record of trust" on the Pakistani side was weak; there had been "zero" movement on democratization, and the fundamentalists remained strong as ever. The Mukhtar Bibi rape case demonstrated their strength. Retrogressive laws remained in place.

HE'S THE BEST HOPE FOR BOTH OF US

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15. (C) PolCouns pushed back strongly on Sinha, saying Musharraf was the best bet we and India had for reforms in Pakistan that we both sought. The Composite Dialogue, stressed PolCouns, was an important way for India to give Musharraf support when he needed it most. Besides, said PolCouns, A/S Rocca had made strong statements about the need for democracy in Pakistan, and movement in that direction would hopefully be forthcoming. PolCouns also pitched to Sinha the need for improved US/India intelligence-sharing on groups like LeT so we can work together to find ways to strengthen the elements of Pakistani society that support President Musharraf's vision for a peaceful, multi-ethnic, democratic, and prosperous future.

KEEP THEIR FEET TO THE FIRE

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16. (C) COMMENT: The Indians are moving ahead with Composite Dialogue and confidence-building measures, but they are puzzled by Pakistani delays or outright refusal to make progress in some areas. The Indians are also still deeply skeptical of Musharraf's true intentions (reftel). As we head into the Manmohan Singh-Musharraf meeting at UNGA in New York, we need to keep the pressure on both sides to ensure that they keep talking in a meaningful and productive manner. As we continue to support Musharraf's latest crackdown on extremism, it will be important to develop a metric for progress on which we and the GOI can agree, since India's involvement will be key to long-term progress. END COMMENT.

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